

Message Text

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ORIGIN NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IGA-02 AID-05 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07

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TO AMEMBASSY DACCA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 050320

EO. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, OTRA, BG, IN US

SUBJ: MEETING OF IRRIGATION ADVISOR ABBAS WITH
DEPUTY ASST SECRETARY DUBS

REF: STATE 034739 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: BANGLADESH PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR ON IRRIGATION
B. M. ABBAS DISCUSSED HIS COUNTRY'S PROBLEMS WITH INDIA
OVER WATER IN CALL ON DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY DUBS
MARCH 1. ABBAS, ACCOMPANIED BY AMBASSADOR SIDDIQI AND
ECONOMIC COUNSELOR KARIM, OUTLINED HISTORY OF FARAKKA
DISPUTE AND ASKED THAT USG USE ITS GOOD OFFICES TO PERSUADE
GOI TO AGREE TO UNCONDITIONAL TALKS. DUBS THANKED ABBAS
FOR HIS PRESENTATION, EXPRESSED USG RECOGNITION OF
IMPORTANCE AND COMPLEXITY OF PROBLEM, AND SAID WE BELIEVE
THAT OUTSIDE INTERVENTION WOULD NOT ENCOURAGE A SPEEDY
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SOLUTION. END SUMMARY.

2. ABBAS TOLD DUBS THAT THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF HIS VISIT TO THE U.S. WAS TO ATTEND THE PREPARATORY CONFERENCE FOR THE UN WATER CONFERENCE TO BE HELD IN ARGENTINA. HE ALSO HELD DISCUSSIONS WITH WORLD BANK PRESIDENT MCNAMARA ON A WIDE RANGE OF WATER DEVELOPMENT ISSUES, INCLUDING POSSIBLE BANK INTEREST IN A GANGES DEVELOPMENT PROJECT SIMILAR IN

SCOPE TO THE INDUS PROJECT. ASIDE FROM CHARACTERIZING THE TALKS WITH MCNAMARA AS "VERY GOOD", ABBAS DID NOT DISCUSS WORLD BANK SESSION IN DETAIL.

3. APPARENTLY REPEATING PRESENTATION HE HAD MADE TO THE UK GOVERNMENT DURING HIS STOPOVER IN LONDON, ABBAS OUTLINED THE HISTORY OF THE FARAKKA DISPUTE. HE SAID THAT BOTH COUNTRIES HAD BEEN HOPEFUL THAT THE JOINT RIVERS COMMISSION ESTABLISHED AS A RESULT OF TALKS BETWEEN MRS. GANDHI AND SHEIKH MUJIB WOULD BE ABLE TO RESOLVE THE QUESTION OF WATER ALLOCATION, BUT IT WAS NEVER ABLE TO DO SO. THE BDG REGARDED THE AGREEMENT COVERING WITHDRAWALS DURING THE 1975 LEAN SEASON AS A FAIR ONE FOR BOTH SIDES, AND HAD ASSUMED THAT FURTHER TALKS WOULD BE HELD FOLLOWING EXPIRY OF THE AGREEMENT ON MAY 31. THE GOI, HOWEVER, COMMENCED WITHDRAWALS AT THE MAXIMUM RATE OF 40,000 CUSECS, AND THE EFFECTS OF THESE WITHDRAWALS NOW POSE A CONSIDERABLE CRISIS FOR BANGLADESH. NAVIGATION IS IMPAIRED, SALINITY IS CREEPING UPSTREAM, AND CROPS WILL SUFFER. THE RIVER LEVEL IN JANUARY WAS AT A LOW USUALLY REACHED ONLY IN APRIL, ACCORDING TO ABBAS.

4. THE BDG SENT NOTES OF PROTEST TO THE GOI ON JANUARY 15 AND FEBRUARY 3, ABBAS SAID, AND FINALLY RECEIVED A RESPONSE FROM INDIA FEBRUARY 10. INDIA OFFERED TALKS ON LEAN PERIOD WITHDRAWALS ONLY; BANGLADESH RESPONDED THAT TALKS SHOULD BE UNCONDITIONAL, SINCE THE LEAN PERIOD COULD BE ARTIFICALLY EXTENDED BY WATER WITHDRAWALS. ABBAS APPARENTLY BELIEVES THAT GOI WILL SEEK TO REVIVE THE IDEA OF A LINK CANAL FROM THE BRAHMAPUTRA TO CHANNEL WATER INTO THE GANGES AND COMPENSATE FOR INDIAN WITHDRAWALS. THE BDG WOULD ACCEPT

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THE IDEA OF SUCH A CANAL ONLY IF IT COULD BE CONTROLLED BY BANGLADESH AND ONLY IF IT COULD BE ACCOMPANIED BY FLOOD CONTROL DEVICES (DAMS, RESERVOIRS) ALONG ITS ROUTE. BDG REQUESTED GOOD OFFICES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE IN PERSUADING INDIA TO AGREE TO TALKS WITHOUT CONDITIONS.

5. ABBAS SAID THAT THE BDG BELIEVED DIVERSION OF THE GANGES WATERS WOULD NOT IMPROVE THE PORT OF CALCUTTA;

ONLY DREDGING WOULD IMPROVE THE HOOGHLY'S TIDAL CHANNEL. THE REAL AND PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THE BARRAGE WAS TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL WATER FOR AGRICULTURE IN WEST BENGAL. BANGLADESH DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT THERE IS ENOUGH GANGES WATER FOR BOTH COUNTRIES IF INDIAN WITHDRAWALS CONTINUE, AND FEELS THAT A COORDINATED PLAN OF DEVELOPMENT ENCOMPASSING DAMS, POWER GENERATION, RESERVOIRS IN NEPAL, INDIA AND BANGLADESH IS NEEDED TO SOLVE THE WATER AND POWER PROBLEMS OF THE ENTIRE AREA. INDIA,

HOWEVER, IS ALLEGEDLY UNWILLING TO DISCUSS SUCH A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.

6. MR. DUBS THANKED ABBAS FOR HIS EXPLANATION OF THE PROBLEM, AND EXPLAINED THAT THE USG DESIRED AN EARLY AND EQUITABLE SOLUTION SATISFACTORY TO BOTH PARTIES. HE RECOGNIZED THAT NEITHER SIDE WOULD BE ENTIRELY SATISFIED WITH WHATEVER SOLUTION EVENTUALLY EMERGED, BUT BELIEVED THAT THERE WERE COMPELLING REASONS FOR BOTH SIDES TO SEEK ACCOMMODATION. DUBS ADDED THAT HE BELIEVED INTERVENTION OF THE USG OR ANY THIRD PARTY IN THE ISSUE MIGHT BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE. DUBS EXPRESSED HOPE THAT BOTH SIDES COULD AVOID DRAMATIZING THE ISSUE IN THE PRESS BECAUSE THIS COULD LEAD TO INCREASED RIGIDITY ON BOTH SIDES. INGERSOLL

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